DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 826 FL 015 671

AUTHOR Rinvolucri, Mario
TITLE Recipes for Tired Teachers.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 8p.; In: New Approaches in the Language Classroom: Coping with Change. Proceedings of the National Modern Languages Convention (2nd, Dublin, Ireland, January 31-February 1, 1986); see FL 015 669.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; *Classroom Techniques; *Grammar; Listening Comprehension; *Second Language Instruction; Sentence Structure; Story Telling; *Student Motivation; *Vocabulary Development

ABSTRACT

Four classroom exercises for second language instruction are described. In the first exercise, the teacher tells a story from a skeleton outline. Then the teacher pairs the students, provides them with a series of questions about the story, and invites them to cross out the ones they do not like and then to ask their preferred questions of another pair of participants. The second exercise has students choose one sentence or phrase they liked from a brief passage and discuss the reasons for the choice. The third exercise is concerned with vocabulary review. From a list presented, each student chooses two attractive and two unattractive words and then explains the choices to the class. The fourth exercise, a grammar auction, provides students with a notional sum of money and allows them to bid on sentences according to their grammaticality. (MSE)

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RECIPES FOR TIRED TEACHERS

Mario Rinvolucri

Pilgrims Language Courses, Canterbury, UK

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Mario Rinvolucri
Pilgrims Language Courses, Canterbury, UK

RECIPES FOR TIRED TEACHERS

To reduce the barrier between himself and the people in the group, Mario started the workshop sitting on the great green table in the front of the hall. He told a Peter Bichsel story: Der Erfinder. What follows is a 'skeleton' of this story, should you want to tell it orally to one of your own classes. I include only a 'skeleton' so as to encourage you to tell the story orally, in your own words, with your own fillings-out. This tends to be much more effective than reading a story to a group. Much more of your personality, your way of being, goes into a telling than a reading.

Der Erfinder

Lived in country
Drew plans, tore them up, started again
For 40 years never spoke, read newspaper, or received letter
Didn't know radio existed

One day realised he had made invention
Day and night checked plans, calculations
He went to town

Cars instead of horses; electric instead of steam trains; escalators, refrigerators.
Quickly understood - saw telephone and said: 'Aha'
Told people in street 'I have made a great invention'
They did not care

He entered a cafe and explained to a man
'I have invented a machine which shows what's going on miles away'
'Oh the television - there's one in the corner - shall I turn it on?'

The inventor went home
At desk for a month - re-invented car
Same with escalator, telephone, refrigerator
The really hard thing is to invent things that already exist

(nach Peter Bichsel, Der Erfinder, in Kindergeschichten)

Following the telling people were paired and given 50 questions related to the story. They were invited to cross out the questions they did not like. This apparently simple instruction was repeated.

Here are the questions:

1. What did the man in the cafe tell his wife when he got home that night?
2. Is it deeply useful to invent things that have already been invented?
3. What did the inventor look like?
4. Did Chris Brumfit in this group like this story?
5. What kind of house did the inventor live in?
6. What is the underlying theme of this story, for you?
7. Where did the inventor get his living from?
8. Why did the inventor no longer know how to speak to people?
9. What new things surprised the inventor when he went into town?
10. Do you know anybody like this man?
11. What colour were the walls of the inventor's room?
12. Would your brother like this story?
13. What did the inventor look like?
14. What kind of father would the inventor make?
15. Why did the inventor finally decide to go into town?
16. What sort of town did you imagine as you listened to the story?
17. Was the inventor an anti-social man?
18. If the inventor was a Muslim, how many wives would he have?
19. In what ways, if any, do you sympathise with the inventor?
20. What did the inventor do in the trams?
21. Why did the inventor get angry in the cafe?
22. Was this man a lunatic?
23. How did the story begin?
24. Did the story happen for you in England, your own country or somewhere else?
25. Did Bebhinn O Meadhra in this group like the story?
26. What was the inventor's reaction to the new things he saw in the town?
27. Which of the new things did he probably find most revolutionary?
28. Why did this man want to invent things?
29. How did the story end?
30. Were there any roses in the inventor's garden?

31. If the inventor had had hobbies, what might they have been?
32. What sort of relationship do you imagine the inventor having had with his parents?
33. What did the man in the cafe offer to do for the inventor?
34. How could the inventor get by without earning a salary?
35. What is the symbolic meaning of the story?
36. Did the inventor grow potatoes?
37. What do you know about the author of this story, Peter Bichsel?
38. Why are there traffic lights in towns?
39. Why did the inventor often tear up his plans?
40. If the inventor was an animal, what sort of animal would he be?
41. Is this a children's story?
42. Do you think the person who told us the story liked it?
43. What was the weather like when the inventor went to town?
44. What year was the inventor born in?
45. Do you like listening to stupid stories in foreign languages?
46. Was the inventor wearing a tie on the day he went into town or his usual pyjamas?
47. Do you like answering comprehension questions?
48. What did he say to the people he met in the town?
49. How old would the inventor be if he were alive now?
50. Which is the most senseless question in the above list?

After the crossing out phase each pair was invited to put the questions they had retained to another pair.

The feedback sessions that followed this exercise was lively. At one end of the scale someone said that the exercise was 'superb'. The opposite feelings were also present in the group: "I haven't come two hundred miles just for this." One person said that she really enjoyed the telling of the story and felt that the exercise that followed was completely out of place: she just wanted to be around with the story in her head in her own way. Some participants were keen to know the animateur's intention. It is touching to be asked by fully grown adults what they should be feeling and thinking.

One participant suggested there were questions that referred to the text as opposed to questions that had little connection with the text. A discussion ensued about which text, the original telling, Mario's text, or the variously elaborated texts now present in 200 different heads. If you are writing questions about a text, should the questions concern themselves with the original text or the elaborated texts which have supplanted the original text, the texts that are the current reality in the students' minds?

The problem was raised but not solved.

The second exercise we did focussed on a text from Salut Book 2 Unit 4.

6h: **Les premiers clients**

Il y a déjà des gens qui attendent dehors quand j'ouvre les portes. Ce sont des ouvriers qui viennent boire un café. Le boulanger apporte les croissants chauds et les baguettes. Jusqu'à 8 heures, je suis toute seule. Je sers les cafés et je prépare les tartines et les sandwiches. Le matin, des étudiants viennent pour discuter ou écouter des disques au juke-box. La matinée est calme, sauf les jours de marché. Ces jours-là, tous les marchands viennent boire leur café.

Each group member was asked to choose one sentence or phrase from the passage that they liked, for whatever reason. "Je sers les cafés et je prepare les tartines et les sandwiches" was chosen by one man because that's what he has to do every morning. "La matinée est calme, sauf les jours de marché" was chosen by two people because it gave them the feeling of a small French town. Other sentences were chosen for a great variety of reasons.

This technique is a way of getting a group of people to invest the sentences of a text with their own personal meanings. On the way, the sentences in the text get firmly practised. One participant objected that lifting separate sentences out of their context and endowing them with personal meanings in a way destroys the text. In the case of some textbook passages that students are invited to suffer through, this might be a good thing?

The third exercise proposed was for vocabulary revision. We were asked to choose two words we liked and two we didn't from a set of about 20 Italian words on the board.

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People then came and wrote their nice words and their 'ugh' words on the board. What were good words for some were nasty words for others. People were asked to explain their preferences. In this exercise the teacher tries to stay as neutral as possible, savouring each student's explanation equally.

To show that you can do cognitive work on grammar with a class in an energised way Mario ran a grammar auction. Each pair was allocated a notional sum of 10,000 N. Frs and asked to budget how much they felt they wanted to spend on nine sentences in French. Some of the sentences were correct some incorrect. Each pair was advised to spend nothing on sentences they knew to be incorrect, a lot on sentences they recognised as correct and a bit of money on sentences they felt might be correct. They were given five minutes to do this budgeting and grammar thinking.

The sentences were then auctioned. After each sentence was sold the auctioneer told the buyer whether the sentence just bought was correct or not. The idea is to generate a certain amount of excitement around grammar correctness, an area that leaves many students cold.

The best way of using the auction idea is to use it instead of homework correction. Lift 15 incorrect sentences from the children's homework, correct half of them and mix these with uncorrected ones. Run the auction round these sentences. Then give the homework back uncorrected: the students read through to pick out the things worked on in the auction.

By the time people who were at the convention read this compte-rendu they may well have tried out some of the exercises described above: to you I apologise for going over stale old ground. My excuse is that these pages may be of use to colleagues who could not join us at the beginning of February in the halls of Trinity.

References

The first exercise above comes from:

Morgan, J. 1984: Once Upon a time. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

The second exercise was demonstrated at the SEAL workshop run in London in May 1985. I learnt the exercise from Lony Gold, who teaches suggestopaedically in Paris.

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The third exercise comes from:

Morgan, J. 1986: Vocabulary. Oxford.
Oxford University Press.

The last exercise, the auction, is fully described in:
Rinvolucri, M. 1985: Grammar Games. Cambridge.
Cambridge University Press.